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ABSTRACT

Cooperation is one of the central motivating forces in the economic and social organization of China. This unit utilizes a game called "Broken Squares" to initiate a discussion of the concepts of cooperation and competition as possible models for problem solving. In the game, students are confronted with a group task and provided with guidelines for accomplishing the task. Through their own experiences at solving the group "problem," it is intended that students will increase their awareness of how individual attitudes and behavior affect group achievement. Following the game, students engage in a general discussion of the role of cooperation and/or competition played in the game, and then apply their experiences to the case of the China. The unit is intended for use with elementary, secondary, or continuing education students. (DB)

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BROKEN SQUARES

ED 364 435

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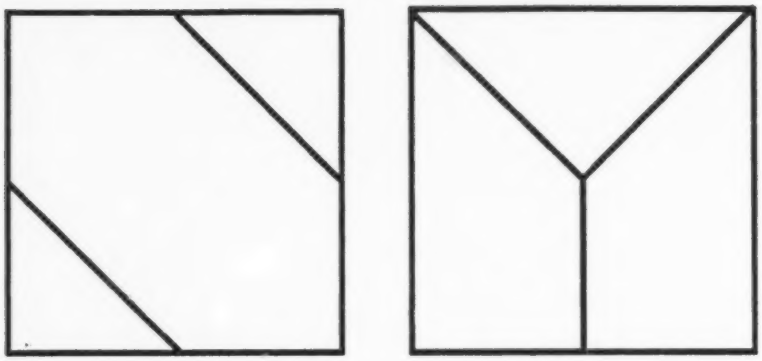
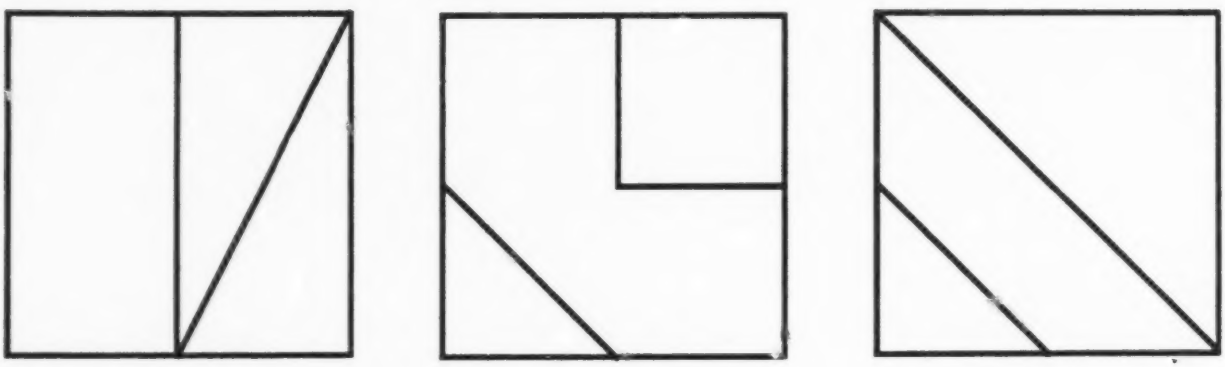




SO 022 412

Broken Squares Game

Cooperation has been one of the motivating forces behind social and economic organization in the People's Republic of China since its founding on October 1, 1949. During the past three decades the Chinese people have brought about enduring changes in their society by channeling their collective energies and working towards nationally identified goals. Before students can grasp the significance of such mobilization efforts and the role cooperation and the collective spirit continue to play in contemporary Chinese society, they must clearly understand and experience what it means to cooperate in group efforts.

The BROKEN SQUARES GAME provides an excellent opportunity for initiating a discussion of the concepts of cooperation and competition as possible models for problem solving. In the game students are confronted with a group task, and provided with guidelines for accomplishing the task. Through their own experiences at solving the group "problem," students will increase their awareness of how individual attitudes and behavior affect group achievement. (Indeed, through the BROKEN SQUARES GAME students may also gain a better understanding of the way in which their own attitudes and behavior affect group interactions both in and out of the classroom.) Following the game, students will engage in a general discussion of the role cooperation and/or competition played in the game, and then apply their experiences to the case of the People's Republic of China.

During the discussion session, students will first air their feelings concerning the events occurring during the playing session itself. Following the "debriefing" session, students will consider how the cooperative ideal stressed in the game applies to "society" in general, and present-day China in particular. Students will evaluate the role of cooperation in the general organizational structure of Chinese society, and view how the cooperative ideal influences the identification of current national goals. Guidelines for integrating this exercise in cooperation into other curriculum units involving specific aspects of Chinese society are also provided. The game is particularly applicable to studies of communes, the educational system, and family life in contemporary China. Additionally, the Broken Squares Game is an exceptional tool for teaching about global awareness and the need for international cooperation. During the debriefing session students can explore international conflict and cooperation based on their experiences within and between groups.

The BROKEN SQUARES GAME may be played successfully with elementary and secondary students, as well as in continuing education classes. Suggestions for adapting the discussion to appropriate grade level are provided. The time requirement for the game itself varies, however, as with any simulation game, ample time for debriefing is crucial. We recommend approximately a 45-minute session for the game and debriefing session.

Overview of the Game

Each group of 5 students will receive pieces of "Broken Squares." Together, these pieces will form 5 complete squares of equal size. However, the pieces allotted to each individual will be insufficient to form one of the desired squares. The group task is to find the right combination of pieces to form 5 equal-sized squares. Each member of the group must have before him/her one complete square equal to the square before the other group members. There are only three rules which group members must obey in accomplishing their joint task: (1) No members may speak; (2) No members may take a piece from another group member, nor in any way signal that they want a piece; (3) Members may give pieces to one another. In this way, sharing and cooperation are necessary if the group task is to be completed!

Objectives

Students will:

- explore methods of "problem-solving" involving cooperation and/or competition;
- experience the need for cooperation in accomplishing a mutual goal;
- investigate characteristics of a "society" and how members of a society work together, using knowledge of their own society as a basis;
- analyze the concepts of cooperation and competition, and the potential role each may play in a society and between society;
- relate their experiences in the game to the case of contemporary China, exploring the role of cooperation and the collective spirit exemplified in the general organization and structure of Chinese society, in the educational system, and/or in the family.

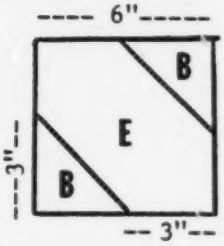
Preparation

Make 1 set of BROKEN SQUARES for each 5 students in the class. (If your class is not divisible by 5, remaining students may serve as "observers.") You will need heavy colored construction paper, 5 envelopes per set, a ruler, a pair of scissors, and a marker. Instructions for the BROKEN SQUARES follow:

(1) Cut a set of five 6" x 6" squares of the same color. (Additional sets of squares may be cut from other colors, but all five squares within a set must be of the same color.)

(2) Further divide the squares according to the diagrams on the following page.

SQUARE #1



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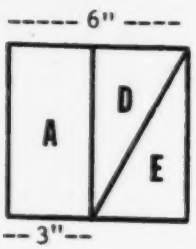

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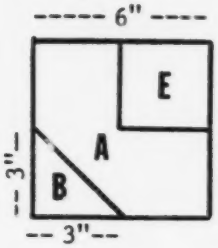

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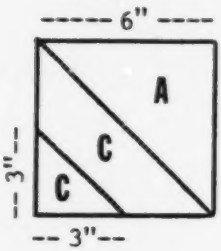

(3) Label the pieces with the letters indicated above, and label five envelopes A, B, C, D, and E, respectively. Put all pieces labelled A in the envelope marked A; B pieces in envelope B, etc.

(4) Make a rules sheet for each group of 5 students. The rules sheet should state:

OBJECTIVE OF THE GAME: To form 5 squares of equal size

RULES:
1. No member may speak.
2. No member may take a piece from another player, nor signal <u>in any way</u> that s/he wants a piece.
3. Members may give pieces to others.

<u>Procedure</u>

(1) Divide the class into groups of five, and seat each group at a table, or arrange 5 desks in a tight circle (so that group members may easily see one another's progress). In classes not divisible by 5, allow remaining students to act as "observers" and record the activities of a group of their choice.

(2) Explain the objective of the game and spell out the rules, stressing that the goal is not achieved until <u>each</u> group member has before him or her a perfect square and all 5 squares are <u>equal</u> size.* You may wish to tell students that the purpose of the exercise is to discover the best means for solving problems, or you may simply have students play the game and determine the "purpose" afterward. Stress to students that there is no "winning" or "losing." Students are simply to "solve" the problem confronting them--to form 5 equal squares from the "broken squares." (See alternative format for another technique)

*<u>NOTE</u>: By using multiples of three inches, several combinations will form one or two squares, but only <u>one</u> combination will provide a solution which forms all five squares.

(3) FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN, the following method may be more effective:

a. Ask the class what "cooperation" means. List the requirements for cooperation on the board. (Keep the list for reference in the follow-up discussion.) Students may list such requirements as: Everyone has to understand the problem; everyone needs to believe that s/he can help; instructions need to be clear; everyone must think of other people, as well as himself or herself, etc.

b. Describe the task before them as a <u>puzzle</u> which can be solved only with cooperation among their group.

c. Instruct students to raise their hand during the game if they have a question concerning procedure.

(4) Pass out the envelopes. One set of envelopes marked A, B, C, D, and E should go to each group. Instruct students NOT TO OPEN THE ENVELOPES UNTIL THE SIGNAL TO BEGIN IS GIVEN. Pass out a copy of the rules to each group and remind students to refer to this sheet if they have questions during the game.

(5) Give the signal to begin.

(6) When the teacher or students serving as "observers" view behavior which is contrary to the rules, the teacher may choose to let the group handle it, or may intervene by reminding students: "Members may only GIVE pieces to others!" or "Remember, no talking or signaling allowed!" Etc., Etc. Such behavior will be investigated during the debriefing session.

(7) When all or most groups have finished, or when students seem to grasp the role of cooperation (vs. competition) in accomplishing a mutually identified goal, call time and bring the class together for a discussion of the issues. (Note that some students will perceive this exercise as a "group task" while others will interpret it as five individual tasks, with each member solely responsible for making one square. The differences between groups should be addressed in the discussion.)

<u>Alternate Suggestion</u>

You may wish to encourage the element of competition between groups to a varying degree. One way to do this is to have students in groups completing the task go observe another group which is not yet finished. A simple statement to this effect: "When <u>your</u> group is finished, silently get up and go observe another group that has not <u>yet</u> finished," will undoubtedly infuse inter-group rivalry. A more direct method for promoting the competitive spirit is to emphasize the notion "whichever group finishes first will be the <u>winner</u>!" If this competitive form of play is chosen, the teacher or student observers must periodically comment on which group is ahead.

The potential results of this technique are ambiguous. Inter-group competition may spark immediate intra-group cooperation--the ultimate object of the game. Alternately, this competitive technique may produce additional tension and anxiety, resulting in less efficiency among players, and ultimately serving as a source of antagonism to the desired cooperative spirit. So, introducing competition may foster cooperation by making the need for good relations within a group more obvious, or it may further deter cooperation by challenging each individual's ability to produce.

Debriefing/Discussion

SECTION I: AIRING STUDENT FEELINGS

As with all debriefing sessions following simulation games, feelings and frustrations must be aired immediately before discussing the heart of the issues. Begin with the following.

(1) Ask each group to briefly describe what happened in their group. If students have helped to monitor the game-playing, ask them to share their observations. Ask students the following questions:

(2) How did you feel while playing the game? Did you experience any problems in completing the task assigned to you? If so, how did you solve the problems?

(3) How did you feel when someone else held a piece you or some other member of your group needed and did not see the solution as you saw it?

(4) What was your reaction when someone in your group finished his/her square and then sat back without caring whether their solution prevented others in the group from solving the problem?

(5) What were your feelings if you finished your square and then began to realize that you would have to break it up and give away a piece in order to enable another person in the group to form a square? How did you come to this realization? How and why did you finally make the decision to break up your square?

(6) Did you observe people in your group breaking the rules in an effort to "direct" the group solution? Did people take pieces from you to keep for themselves or to redistribute to others? How did you and others in your group react to such actions if they occurred? Why do you suppose the person(s) involved acted against the rules?

(7) Did you feel competitive towards others in your group? Did you feel that your group was in competition with other groups? (Student responses to these questions will vary greatly depending on the playing format the teacher has chosen.) Did you feel compelled to finish your square before others in your group or in other groups?

(8) What were your feelings towards members in your group? Did you develop a feeling of unity? If so, why? If no sense of competition was felt, what motivated you to cooperate?

(9) Did you learn anything about yourself from this game? What sorts of things did you learn? (The teacher may also want to relate the exercise to students' general attitudes and relationships to each other and to the teacher.)

SECTION II: DISCUSSING SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Now that feelings of the groups have been aired, have students begin to relate the game to larger issues of social organization, and the role "cooperation" plays in such organization. Students are asked to consider the foundations of "society" as a concept, using their knowledge of their own society as a basis for discussion.

(1) FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN: Review the requirements for "cooperation" that were generated before the game. Have students evaluate how ideals work in reality by asking the following questions: Does cooperation seem more real now? What were the effects when others in your group cooperated? What happened when group members did not cooperate? Are there any other requirements for cooperation to add to the list now that you have completed the game?

(2) What is a "society"? How does the concept of "cooperation" fit into the notion of a "society"? (Students should emphasize various aspects of a "society," such as commonality of economic, political, and/or cultural system; mutually identified goals, etc. From their experiences in the game, students should be able to ascertain that any society requires or assumes a certain amount of cooperation.)

(3) Can you think of particular times in American history when it was especially essential for families and groups to cooperate in joint tasks? (Students may list such examples as the early colonists, the wagon trains, "quilting bees," "barn raisings" etc.) What prompted such cooperation?

(4) In what ways do you see people in our society cooperating today? (e.g., neighborhood organizations, recycling programs, charity drives, political campaigns, etc.)

(5) In our society elements of both cooperation and competition exist; what are the situations in which one predominates over the other? Why? In your opinion, is there a relationship between the notion of competition and the importance placed on individualism in our society?

(6) In what instances do government officials and/or other leaders in our society try to persuade people to cooperate? In your opinion, are our efforts at cooperation effective? Why or why not? (Students may choose to discuss various topics relating to cooperation, such as current attempts at energy conservation, pollution control, crime prevention, etc.)

SECTION III: RELATING "BROKEN SQUARES" TO THE CASE OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA

At the turn of the twentieth century, China was weak militarily, economically and politically. Unifying and strengthening China posed a major challenge to all Chinese leaders of the first half of the century, from Qing (Ch'ing) dynasty officials to Chinese Communist Party cadres. Various groups attempted to find a solution for China's difficulties, ranging from instituting moderate reform programs to incorporating revolutionary changes such as land redistribution. One of the major problems faced by the various leaders aiming to strengthen and unify China was how to instill the populace with a sense of national identification. Traditionally in China, a man's primary loyalty and sense of identification lay with his family; a woman's with her husband's family. Expanding each person's sense of loyalty and identity from the primary family to a broader sense of common purpose and unity with all Chinese was a difficult undertaking, especially in regions with long-standing traditions of extensive clan and regional loyalties. Several approaches for expanding loyalties and encouraging cooperation and unity of purpose among citizens have been identified and implemented by various national leaders desiring to unify diverse groups within the boundaries of their nation, including those used by Chinese leaders of this century. In this section, students are asked to derive strategies aimed at establishing "loyalty" networks and enhancing the cooperative spirit among individuals as well as to observe the policies of contemporary Chinese leaders in this regard.

(1) Can you think of some problems that might be encountered in attempting to transfer people's loyalties from family to nation?

(2) We have already discussed the importance of cooperation in society in general. Given the traditional frame of reference focussing the average person's identity to his/her family or clan, why might fostering unity and cooperation among all Chinese be especially difficult?

(3) Given the magnitude of difficulties facing Chinese leaders and the size of the territory and population within their jurisdiction, why might cooperation be especially essential?

(4) Reflecting on your own experiences in BROKEN SQUARES, what strategies would you recommend for leaders to pursue in an effort to expand popular loyalties and broaden identification networks? (Write student responses on the chalkboard.) Can you site any examples from the game that might offer insights into this issue? (For instance, if hostilities had arisen between group members or between various groups, how would you have reconciled the conflict in order to form a united class again?)

(5) One leader of early Republican China deplored the situation facing potential reformers and revolutionaries desiring to unify China. This leader, Dr. Sun Yatsen, described China as "a heap of loose sand." What do you think Dr. Sun meant by this comparison?

(6) In what ways have Chinese social, political, and economic organizations been expanded? (e.g., peasant association; women's association; neighborhood associations; communes with brigades and work teams; political study groups, etc.) How were these organizational expansions developed? (A study of the development of the rural commune system from "mutual-aid teams would be particularly appropriate in conjunction with this section.)

SECTION III: (CONTINUED)

(7) What role does cooperation play in the formation of such groups?

(8) The former leader of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong, popularized the slogan "To Serve the People." Why was this slogan so important in the effort to expand loyalties and instill a common purpose among the Chinese people?

(9) In America, the individual is often the focal point for identity, while in China the individual is considered subordinate to the group. Keeping this in mind, what do you think is the basis for cooperation in each society? How might this difference explain the different approaches to social and economic organization which are characteristic of each country?

(10) Since 1949, Chinese leaders have chosen to develop economic and social organizations based on a cooperative effort. Even during the current "Four Modernizations" campaign which allots greater resources to specially train promising students (who are identified through highly competitive national examinations), the ultimate result is perceived in terms of the advantage gained for the entire nation. It is not so much individual goals which are served by such policies as promoting scientific and technical training for a privileged few, but national goals which clearly are served by such policies. Given your own experiences in the BROKEN SQUARES GAME, what do you think are the prerequisites for successfully organizing a society on the basis of large-scale cooperation? How are people motivated to pursue nationally identified goals rather than strive for individual recognition and achievement?

(11) If you were to structure the social and economic organization of a model society, what organizational model would you choose? On what principles are the features of social and economic organization you have chosen based?

SECTION IV: COOPERATION AND COMPETITION IN THE CHINESE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The development of the education system in the People's Republic of China has been based, in part, on the concept and practice of cooperation among class members, between students and teachers, teachers and administrators , and the school and surrounding neighborhood. In China students not only learn ABOUT cooperation, they learn THROUGH cooperation. Children are encouraged to share their knowledge and work collectively in the classroom, and to exercise mutual responsibility for one another. Group sports and collective labor have been emphasized extensively. However, dramatic changes in educational policy occur in conjunction with changes in economic policy. Only recently, in July 1978, competitive entrance exams to select students for limited positions within the higher educational system were once again implemented. (Such national examinations were used before the Cultural Revolution of the late sixties and early seventies.) Policies emphasizing technical skill and competence among highly trained specialists selected through competitve examination systems are seen as beneficial to the entire society, and the goals of such policies as the "four modernizations" are expressed in terms of national value. The discussion and exercises below are designed to help students consider the goals of education in China--both for the individual and for the society. Students will also, through experiential exercises, determine how the classroom is best organized to realize such goals. (Students may not only learn about educational techniques in China, but also are encouraged to consider their own responsibilities within the classroom learning situation as well.)

(1) Reflecting on the strategies suggested in SECTION III for broadening the identification base of Chinese citizens from the family to the nation, what role might the education system play in this process of increasing feelings of loyalty to others?

(2) What would you imagine are the goals of the Chinese educational system? For the individual? For the society as a whole?

(3) What do you think are the responsibilities of individuals involved in the educational system in a cooperative society such as China?

   a. Teachers' responsibilities
   b. Students' responsibilities
   c. Administrators' responsibilities
   d. Parental responsibilities
   e. Party cadres, local officials, etc.

(4) What particular features of an educational system might make it more appropriate for a cooperative society? (e.g., group work, classroom & neighborhood cooperative projects, etc.) What features might be inconsistent with the "cooperative spirit"? (e.g., grades/marks; "tracking" or ability grouping; examinations, etc.)

(5) EXERCISE #1: Divide students into several groups (6-8 in each). Have them spend some time studying material for a test within these "study groups". Inform each group that one person from that group will be selected at random to take the test on the material, and that his or her grade will apply to the entire group. (This should encourage students to work together, the faster students helping the slower ones, to guarantee that all in the group learn the material.)

SECTION IV: (CONTINUED)

As a result of this procedure, students often feel that their individual success is closely tied with that of the group. Have students discuss their reactions to this new "learning situation" in general, and to the grade assigned to their group in particular.

(a) What problems, if any, did you encounter in your group?
(b) Did you feel comfortable in your collective role?
(c) For those of you who were selected to take the exam, how did you feel?
(d) How did the rest of you feel depending on someone else to take a test for your grade?
(e) Do your reactions depend partly on the results of the testing? In other words, do you think you would have felt the same if the person taking the test for your group performed well or performed poorly?
(f) Make a list of the "pros and cons" of this style of learning situation. Discuss.

(6) EXERCISE #2: Give the students a fact-oriented test (e.g., multiple chioce) on something they have been studying recently. On the first day have them take the test individually for grades. On the second day, divide the class into groups and administer a similar test. However, let them take the test in these groups, consulting on responses, and pooling their knowledge. Each group will receive a common grade depending on their collective performance on the test. Have students discuss the merits of each system of testing:

(a) Which system do you consider to be a more effective measure?
(b) Which is more fair?
(c) Which do you feel is more rewarding?
(d) If you had your choice of testing methods, which would you choose and why?

NOTE: While current educational strategies in the PRC incorporate "achievement charts" and competitive examinations, as well as individual marks, Chinese students remain familiar with a high degree of collectivity even today. Testing methodologies such as those in EXERCISES #1 and #2 were popular during and shortly after the Cultural Revolution, in an effort to foster group cooperation.

SECTION V: COOPERATION AND THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

As noted, historically Chinese family and clan ties have been the focus of social organization. The family continues to be an important social structure in China. All family members have a role to play in ensuring that family life runs smoothly. Responsibilities are divided in order to provide for the needs of all family members on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, cooperation seems to begin at home. This section is designed to be used in conjunction with the study of the contemporary Chinese family. (Please see suggested materials list appended to this unit.)

(1) How might relations among family members play an important role in fostering cooperation among individuals?

(2) Historically, what were some of the ways in which family members cooperated? What role did competition play among families? (Students may mention the role of the extended family and the concept of filial piety in relation to cooperation.) What differences might exist between the "ideal" of the Chinese family and specific relations among members of particular families?

(3) What are some of the ways in which a family must cooperate? What specific roles are outlined? (E.g., Who are the wage earners? Who is responsible for meal preparation; housecare; childcare; socializing young people; caring for aging parents, etc?)

(4) What are some of the ways in which Chinese family members exercise responsibility for one another through cooperation? (Have students explore the role of retired people--grandparents, etc., how young children are socialized, etc.)

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SECTION VI: BROKEN SQUARES--COOPERATION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

In Section II students explored the role of cooperation versus competition among individuals within a society. Going one step further, have students discuss the role of cooperation and competition among various societies and nations. Have students explore the dimensions of cooperation and competition in a global context from both an historical and a contemporary perspective.

(1) Historically, what role has competition played in the international arena? (Student responses will vary greatly. Important issues to bring up include: The European quest for territories and riches in the New World, Asia and Africa, followed by the "new age of expansion"; the role of "cultural supremacy" and colonization of peoples in the world, etc. Additionally, some students may focus on specific conflicts which are the direct or indirect result of international competition such as wars, arms build-up, the "space race" etc.

(2) Historically, what role has international cooperation played on an international scale? (Students may mention the issue of "foreign aid" as an example of "cooperation," as well as such international organizations as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, etc. Also, treaty alliances and various private charities with an international focus might be mentioned by students as examples of "cooperation" on an international scale.)

(3) In what forms does internaitonal competition continue to exist? Based on your experiences in the game, what might some of the causes for such competition be? What suggestions can you offer for resolving competitive forces which may be a potential source of international conflict?

(4) What are some of the mechanisms for international cooperation in the contemporary world? Do contemporary circumstances warrant new forms of international cooperation which were not necessary or possible in the past? (Students may bring up such matters as advanced transportation technology leading to increased contact among societies; the threat of nuclear arms proliferation; the increasing realization of the finite nature of natural resources, etc.)

(5) Thinking back to the suggestions made for increasing alliances from the family/clan to the nation as dicussed in Section III, how can we go about enhancing individuals' sensitivity to their role within the international as well as their national community?

FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS:

(1) Have students review their list of prerequisites for "cooperation." Then ask about the concept of competition: What do we mean by competition?

(2) How did nations compete a long time ago? (e.g., during the discovery era) What caused nations to cooperate in the past?

(3) In the world today, do nations continue to compete? In what ways and why? How do nations cooperate today? Why is international cooperation so important now?

(4) Can you think of ways to help people realize that international cooperation is important? Pretend each group in the game was a "nation." How could you help the different groups realize that cooperation among them is important?

SUGGESTED MATERIALS LIST

The following BAYCEP classroom materials are highly recommended for use in conjunction with BROKEN SQUARES.

In relation to Chinese social and economic organization:

- Debriefing "STARPOWER" on China: STARPOWER is an exciting and useful simulation game produced by SIMILE II (P.O. Box 910, Del Mar, California 92014). The game creates a society of "haves" and "have-nots" (similar to the landlord-peasant relationship of pre-revolutionary China), resulting in a proto-revolutionary situation. STARPOWER offers an experiental approach to the Chinese revolutionary movement of the 20th century. The BAYCEP unit offers specific guidelines for relating the game to the study of China. (Middle School/Secondary)

In relation to the study of the Chinese family:

- All in the Family: In this unit students explore the changes in values and family ideals from traditional Chinese families to modern Chinese families. Students then create stories to accompany the slides provided, illustrating the appropriate family ideals. (Upper Elementary/ Middle School)

- Family Life in Rural China: This unit features a four-part slide presentation focussing on the daily life of one family in rural Guangdong. The unit includes some map work and geography exercises, an overview of village life, as well as a close-up view of the role of various family members--the grandmother, parents, and children. (Upper Elementary/Middle School)

In relation to education in modern China

- Education in the People's Republic of China: This teaching unit gives students an opportunity to view different approaches to educational concerns. It includes a case study (in slide form) of education in contemporary China. Also included is a hypothetical exercise in which students design the educational policy of a hypothetical developing country. Cross-cultural charts encourage students to make comparisons with the educational system in their own country, identifying universals in education as well as assessing the differences between the educational systems of the People's Republic and the United States. (Secondary)

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This unit has been prepared by the Bay Area China Education Project (BAYCEP). We welcome your comments and criticism for the purpose of improving the quality of our teaching materials. Please call or write the BAYCEP office:

Stanford Program on International and
Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE)
Littlefield Center, Room 14
300 Lasuen Street
Stanford University
Stanford, California 94305-5013
(415) 723-1114

This lesson has been adapted from An Experiment in Cooperation: Cooperation Squares Game, (c) 1970 by NTL Institute.